Wanted: A More Realistic Educational Preparation for Women

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Women's career aspirations can be elevated more effectively and constructively through providing needed adjustments both in the formal and the informal curricula.

RECENT statistics on the position of women relative to employment in the United States suggest one thing: it is time for teachers, counselors, and curriculum planners to rethink their attitudes and behaviors toward women in our educational institutions.

Today, more than 35,000,000 women are in the labor force; they constitute two-fifths of all workers. Contrary to popular belief, about 60 percent of the women who work do so for economic need. They are either single, widowed, divorced, separated, or have husbands earning less than $7,000 per year. Women now head one out of ten families.[1] It is prognosticated that of the young women in our schools today, more than half will work full time for 35 years or more.[2] These statistics have far-reaching implications for educators at all levels.

While the schools ostensibly offer the same curriculum and educational opportunities for young women and men during their elementary and secondary school years, there is a pervasive belief that women will marry after a relatively brief sojourn into the labor market and "live happily ever after." Present figures on women's employment challenge this time-honored myth.

The majority of women who enter the work force are clustered in routine, non-status, low paying jobs. Approximately 75 percent of all women employees are in sales, clerical, service, factory, or domestic work. Only 16 percent of all women workers are classified as professional or technical, and of these, two-fifths are elementary or secondary school teachers.[3] Presently only 7 percent of this country's physicians are women, 3 per-

[1] Women's Bureau, United States Department of Labor. *Why Women Work.* Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1974. pp. 1-2.

[2] Laurie Olsen Johnson, editor. *Nonsexist Curricular Materials for Elementary Schools.* Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1974. p. 12.

[3] "Fact Bombardment." *Colloquy* 6 (9): 31; November 1973.

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cent are lawyers, and 1 percent are engineers.[4] The median earnings by race and sex in 1972 for full-time workers were: white men, $10,593; black men, $7,301; white women, $5,998; and black women, $5,147.[5]

Why are women clustered in these low paying jobs? The average woman has completed slightly more schooling than the average man. White men have completed a median of 12.4 years of schooling, white women 12.3 years, black men 10.9 years, and black women 11.1 years.[6]

One reason that women are clustered at the lower end of the pay scale is that there are differing role expectancies for men and women in this culture. As a young man progresses through the school years, he becomes increasingly aware that during his adult years he will be employed and most probably be the breadwinner for a family. A future occupation, then, becomes a serious goal.

Young women generally do not take their occupational role as seriously. They are not made aware of the very real likelihood of their future employment. Cultural expectations lead them to believe that they will be in the labor market briefly or sporadically and that their real career is that of wife and mother. In any case, they do not seriously prepare for a lifetime occupation.

Over half of the women in high school vocational programs are studying home economics while another third are being prepared in office skills.[7] Neither program leads to an occupation that is comparable in pay or skill with many of the male vocations in trade and industry.

[4] Women's Bureau, United States Department of Labor. *Underutilization of Women Workers.* Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971. p. 10.

[5] Project on the Status and Education of Women. *Minority Women and Higher Education.* No. 1. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, November 1974. p. 4.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[7] Citizen's Advisory Council on the Status of Women, United States Department of Labor. *Need for Studies of Sex Discrimination.* Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, September 1972. p. 1.

Fighting the Vicious Circle

College women continue to select traditional fields of study which lead to low paying, low status occupations, or worse yet—as in the case of the proverbial literature major—no job at all. In a recent study of degrees conferred by nine colleges and universities in the Cleveland metropolitan area, 81 percent of the degrees conferred in Home Economics, Health Professions, Education, Public Affairs and Services, and Fine and Applied Arts went to women.[8] In contrast, 91 percent of the degrees conferred in Engineering, Business and Management, Computer and Information Sciences, and Physical Sciences went to men.[9] The degrees earned by men are more likely to become stepping-stones to high paying, high status occupations. The Cleveland metropolitan pattern is consistent with the national picture.[10]

While opportunities for employment in traditionally male occupations are opening up to women due to recent federal legislation, women are not receiving the training and education necessary to enter these fields. A large proportion of women continue to train for the traditional female occupations—secretary, nurse, and teacher.

It would be extremely unfair to lay the blame for women's lower occupational aspirations upon the educational system. It has been less than a decade since the women's movement raised our national consciousness to question women's roles. It has been little more than a decade since Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of sex, and the Equal Pay Act of 1963 outlawed discrimination in pay on the basis of sex. A dominant and persistent belief continues in this culture that woman's proper role is that of wife and mother. Consciously and unconsciously, our culture downgrades the impor-

[8] Laverne C. Zell and Edric A. Weld, Jr. *Women's Participation in Higher Education.* Cleveland, Ohio: Institute of Urban Studies, Cleveland State University, 1974. p. 16.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

tance of education and career aspirations for women. Tacitly, women learn not to seek a self-identity but rather to take their identity from the males in their lives—fathers, husbands, and sons. The whole enculturation process subtly and continuously teaches women what their appropriate roles and attitudes should be.

The issue I am posing is essentially a moral one. Are we as educators living up to our ideals of preparing each individual to his or her fullest intellectual and social potential? Are we recognizing the changes taking place in today's society and how they affect the likelihood of women's employment? Are we preparing young women for realistic futures as wage earners, and perhaps, heads of households? The time is here to begin preparing women as seriously as we do men for future occupational roles.

Two changes are necessary in our educational system to meet the needs of today's women students. Both the formal and informal curriculums must change. The formal curriculum is that which is planned and organized in an effort to impart knowledge, attitudes, and skills to the younger generation. The informal curriculum is that which is learned tacitly through the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and peers; it contains the hidden messages that ricochet throughout the schools, which in this case reinforce the culture's stereotypes.

Suggestions for Change

The formal curriculum lends itself more easily to change. Several suggestions follow for improving women's career aspirations through the formal curriculum:

1. Discuss freely with students the differing sex role expectations in our culture and how they lead to stereotypic occupational selections. Discuss the factors in our society which increase the likelihood of women's full-time employment.

2. Offer career seminars in which young women and men are exposed to role models in innovative or nontraditional occupational roles. Initiate open discussion on the problems involved.

3. Offer access to all areas of study to men and women equally. Eliminate requirements that apply to only one sex, such as all females need a course in home economics and all males need a course in industrial arts. This, in fact, is legally mandated by Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments.[11]

4. Form a curriculum committee to re-

[11] Section 86.34 states: "A recipient shall not provide any course or otherwise carry out any of its education program or activity separately on the basis of sex, or require or refuse participation therein by any of its students on such basis, including health, physical education, industrial, business, vocational, technical, home economics, music, and adult education courses." Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. *Federal Register*. Vol. 40, No. 108. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, June 4, 1975.



view present texts for sex role stereotypes and unequal representation of minority groups. Develop criteria for future text selection that will assure fair treatment of women and minorities.[12]

5. Create your own curriculum materials to make up for deficiencies in current texts. For example, add the contributions of women to this country's history and culture in much the same way as you have found it necessary to include the contributions of blacks.

6. Make the "hard" sciences more interesting and attainable to women. This must be begun in the elementary school before females become "turned off" from this traditional male province. Elementary and secondary school teachers of either sex who do not enjoy science and who do not believe that females can achieve as well as males in this field should not be allowed to teach science.

Teachers' attitudes are crucial in developing realistic career aspirations in women. Teachers need to be willing to reeducate themselves as to women's roles and positions within this culture. Only as teachers' attitudes and behaviors change will the informal and hidden curriculum of the schools be altered.

Raising Levels of Awareness

There are two viable approaches for teachers to take to reeducate themselves as to women's changing roles. One is subjective, the other, objective.

[12] An excellent source of help for teachers and curriculum committees in evaluating texts is in: *Nonsexist Curricular Materials for Elementary Schools*, edited by Laurie Olsen Johnson. Available from The Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, New York 11568.

Times are changing, but some textbook manufacturers are still illustrating "World of Work" texts with examples such as the following:

CONSUMER & HOMEMAKING CAREERS

Budget Consultant
Dietitian
Fashion Coordinator
Food Specialist
Four-H Club Agent
Home Economist
Interior Decorator
Maid
Nursery School Teacher
Seamstress/Tailor

HEALTH CAREERS

Dental Assistant
Dentist
EEG/EKG Technician
Licensed Vocational Nurse
Nuclear Medical Technologist
Nurse's Aide
Physician
Registered Nurse
X-Ray Technologist



The first is a modified version of consciousness raising, a technique which has been used very successfully by the women's movement. In consciousness raising, women share their experiences of unequal treatment and discrimination in a male dominated society. In this way, levels of awareness are raised. Groups of teachers can explore together their present beliefs and practices regarding women students and thus raise their levels of awareness as to the dangers of sexual stereotypes within the school.

The second, a more academic and objective approach, is to study the evidence from the various disciplines—history, economics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology as it pertains to women. For example, the research from child development suggests few innate psychological differences between the sexes. Both sexes are similar on tests of intellectual abilities. They do not differ in their method of learning, in creativity, or in cognitive style. Girls excel in verbal abilities only after adolescence; boys, also, excel in mathematical and visual-spatial abilities after adolescence. This suggests that the sexes have learned their lessons well as to this culture's expectations. In only one area is a psychological difference found early, consistently, and cross culturally. This is in the area of aggression. Boys show more aggressive behavior both physically and verbally. There is strong evidence to prove that aggression is linked to the male sex hormones.[13] Since few adult occupations today require aggressive behavior,[14] it is difficult to justify the present distribution of jobs on the basis of this innate tendency. There is strong evidence to conclude that the intellectual and creative potential of this country's women is our most neglected natural resource.

Just as the psychological research sheds light on women's capabilities, the literature from other disciplines provides breadth and depth on women's past and present condition. A selected list of books that should be of interest to teachers in this respect follows this article. As teachers are able to take a more informed view on the position and role of women, their own attitudes and behaviors toward their women students will change.

Perhaps the alternative that holds the most promise for teacher reeducation is a blend of the two approaches. Initiate both consciousness raising groups to explore the hidden biases operating in your school, and at the same time delve into the research on women's capabilities and changing roles.

Finally, it is this writer's belief that we as educators have a moral obligation to the young women in our schools to help them form realistic and personally fulfilling career plans. To that end we must change both the formal and informal curriculums of our schools. This can only be accomplished by each teacher's willingness to reeducate himself or herself as to the roles that women can and will play in this society.

[13] See: Eleanor Maccoby and Carol N. Jacklin. *The Psychology of Sex Differences*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974, for a thorough documentation of the studies on children's personality and cognitive differences.

[14] There is a distinction between aggressive and assertive behavior. Aggressive behavior, either physical or verbal, is aimed at injuring another person, either physically or psychologically. Assertive behavior is not at the expense of another. It is an attempt to maintain one's own self-esteem—to claim one's rights. Today's occupations do require assertive behavior, but this is neither innate nor solely a male province. Assertiveness may be learned. See: *Time*, May 19, 1975, p. 65.

Selected Readings

Jessie Barnard. *The Future of Motherhood*. New York: World Publishing Company, 1974.

Mary R. Beard. *Woman as Force in History*. New York: Collier Books, 1962.

Eleanor Flexner. *Century of Struggle*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1966.

Eleanor Maccoby, editor. *The Development of Sex Differences*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974.

Mary Louise McBee and Kathryn A. Blake. *The American Woman: Who Will She Be?* Beverly Hills, California: Glencoe Press, 1974.

Margaret Mead. *Sex and Temperament*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1935.

F. Ivan Nye and Lois Wladis Hoffman. *The Employed Mother in America*. Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1963.

Samuel H. Osipow, editor. *Emerging Woman: Career Analysis and Outlooks*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1975.

Philip Slater. "Women and Children First." *The Pursuit of Loneliness*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970. □

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